

Pasadena Star-News
Thursday June 17, 2004

Water company to leave 2 wells shut down

Lincoln Avenue to wait for new plant

By Kimm Groshong, Staff Writer

ALTADENA -- The Lincoln Avenue Water Company says it will not use two wells found to have perchlorate levels exceeding state levels until its new NASA-funded treatment plant opens next month. "Technically, we could still turn the wells on," said General Manager Robert Hayward. However, he said, "we are not going to do that. We are going to take public health into consideration and leave the wells off until the new system plant is up and running."

"We know that perchlorate in our drinking water wells originated from past discharges at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, the known perchlorate plume site," the private company said in a letter to its several thousand customers.

Decades of chemical contamination from JPL's disposal of rocket fuel in ground seepage pits during the 1940s and 1950s, has resulted in high concentrations of perchlorate and volatile organic compounds in the area's groundwater.

While no maximum contaminant level is in place for perchlorate in drinking water, California's advisory to protect consumers increased from four to six parts per billion in March. One part per billion is equivalent to about one drop of water in an Olympic-sized swimming pool.

Perchlorate has been linked to thyroid problems, especially in developing fetuses, as the chemical can interfere with normal uptake of iodine by the thyroid gland.

In April and May, samples from Lincoln Avenue Water Company's well-head registered perchlorate levels between eight and 15 parts per billion. The new treatment plant was designed by U.S. Filter and will use ion-exchange technology to remove the perchlorate from water to an undetectable level, Hayward said.

Steve Slaten, NASA's remedial project manager who is overseeing the water cleanup effort around JPL, said he applauds Lincoln Avenue Water Company's initiative and added, "We are taking the responsibility for funding." Another filtration system is under construction at the heart of the area with the highest level of chemicals on JPL's campus. Slaten said he is hoping for the start up of that plant later this summer.

Kimm Groshong can be reached at (626) 578-6300, Ext. 4451, or by e-mail at kimm.groshong@sgvn.com